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Inside information for comic dealers and collectors!

#5

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VANTAGE
PRESS RELEASE REVIEW
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Vantage: Press Release Review,
Volume One, Number 5,
August 1994.

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Cover: Spider-Man TM & © 1994 Marvel Entertainment Group
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Top Picks of the Month

Amazing Spider-Man #143-151 (Marvel/Clone story back-issues)
Spider-Man titles, current issues (Marvel/Clone story)

More Vantage Picks

Batman #0 (DC/Zero Month)
Detective Comics #0 (DC/Zero Month)
Flash #0 (DC/Zero Month)
Flash #91-92 (DC)
Green Lantern #0 (DC/Zero Month)
The Invisibles #1-up (DC/Vertigo)
Marvel Tales #126 (Marvel/Clone back-issue)
Legion of Super-Heroes #0 (DC/Zero Month)
Prime #1-2 (Malibu/Ultraverse)
Spectre #0 (DC/Zero Month)
Spectacular Spider-Man Annual #8 (Marvel/Clone story)
Ultraforce #1-up (Malibu/Ultraverse)
What If? #30 (Marvel/Clone back-issue)
WildC.A.T.s #1-2, #5 (Image/Wildstorm back-issues)

VANTAGE PICK

Watch for the Vantage Star indicating our top picks!

"The above pick list is a guide based on research, advisors' opinions, and staff opinions — keep in mind that even the experts will disagree. Comics can lose value after months or years. You would be wise to trade or sell books before they lose value. Read over the facts and opinions in Vantage, examine the pick list, and then make your own decisions. Remember: 1) There's no sure thing. Never bet the farm on any one book. 2) It may be fun to hunt for winners, but comics are even more fun to read! Open up one of those sealed polybags and give comics a try!"
- Publisher Rob Golub

OF SPIDER-MAN AND STORES FOR HER

For once I'll use this space for something other than a plug. Can you believe it?

First off, I've been hearing criticism of the new Spider-Man storyline. Some people have been saying that this is a slimy Marvel sales stunt.

I disagree. I thinks it's a great idea. Is it a sales stunt? Of course! Comic books are not just an entertainment medium, they're a business! Comic book companies are supposed to pull sales stunts. That's their job.

Just putting a good comic on the market doesn't cut it. You've got to sell your comic, and putting together a storyline that makes you think and wonder is a great way to do it.

We all knew something was going to happen to Spider-Man, but this is so much more creative and fulfilling than killing the poor guy. I applaud Marvel for making a wonderful choice.

Columnist Corey Bond got me thinking, and I agree with many of his points (see The View From Oblivion, this issue).

I also feel that even if Dream Factory For Her stores don't take the nation by storm, that the people behind this idea deserve some credit for trying. Clearly, it would be good for comics if we could reach new kinds of customers.

I'd love to see a store with comics as diverse as a book store or magazine shop, perhaps with an action/adventure section, a romance section, a science-fiction section, a drama section, and, yes, a super-hero section. I only hope that Dream Factory, or somebody, can pull it off. –Rob Golub

NOT JUST ANOTHER ULTRA TEAM BOOK

Sources close to Malibu have indicated to **Vantage** that **Ultraforce**, the new team book from Malibu, will be a top candidate for licensing projects such as video games, toys, and animated cartoons.

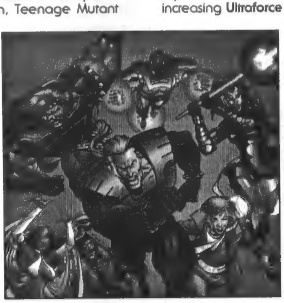
"Licensing" refers to the owner of a character or concept granting other companies permission (the license) to produce games, toys, cartoons, movies, or other items using that character or concept. Extensive licensing has historically helped to build long-term interest in back-issues of comics like Spider-Man, Superman, Batman, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, and many others.

Ultraforce, along with **Prime**, will become a centerpiece in Ultraverse marketing, our source tells us, and we can expect to see disproportionately large use of Prime and the Ultraforce for video games, toys, and perhaps even an eventual animated cartoon.

Ultraforce #1, due out soon, will be the first Ultraverse team book that features characters who have already had their own series. Unlike **Strangers**, **Freex**, and **Exiles**, **Ultraforce** will combine established heroes like Prime, Prototype, and Hardcase with a sampling of new heroes.

For months, it had been obvious that Prime was considered the flagship character in Malibu marketing. Prime, and only Prime, appears at the top of Malibu office stationery, and Prime is always most prominently featured in general Ultraverse advertising.

Now it appears that Prime may have to share his position as Ultraverse marketing representative with Ultraforce. Look for an increasing **Ultraforce** emphasis in Malibu marketing. As regular readers know, **Vantage** takes a special interest in Malibu — print runs are low but not unhealthy, marketing is professional and strong, and the company recently sold part of itself off to a major animated cartoon production company.



Ultraforce TM & © 1994 Malibu Comics Entertainment

Although we made **Prime** #1-2 picks before they even came out, we reemphasize their long-term importance again this issue, and enthusiastically add **Ultraforce** #1 to the pick list. Due out soon.

HOSTILE TAKEOVER: OVERHEARD

Hostile Takeover is the new five-title one-month crossover from Ultraverse. Evil corporations go head to head using Ultras as pawns in **Prototype** #13 (HT #0), **Night Man** #12 (HT #1), Solitaire #10 (HT #2), **The Solution** #13 (HT #3), and Giant Size Prototype #1 (HT #4)

"Hostile Takeover is the comic book and business story that I've been dying to write for years."
—Len Strazewski, writer of Prototype

"I'm really looking forward to Hostile Takeover as a chance to broaden Solitaire's scope and play with some new Ultraverse elements."
—Gerard Jones, writer of Solitaire

"Hostile Takeover is like Barbarians at the Gate with ultras."
—James Hudnall, writer of The Solution

"I feel hostile already"
—Steve Englehart, writer of The Night Man

"There will be some changes that occur that will affect the entire Ultraverse from here on"
— Roland Mann, Editor

THE SPIDER-MAN CLONE RETURNS

For those of you who missed last issue, **Vantage** scooped every other magazine in the comic book industry with our exclusive story on the return of Spider-Man's clone. **Vantage** announced that Marvel plans to bring Spider-Man's clone back, after his supposed introduction and death in **Amazing Spider-Man** #149 nineteen years ago.

Vantage also announced that we further learned from inside sources that Marvel intends to present the returning clone as the possible real Spider-Man, leaving us guessing for months.

Yes, it is possible that the Spider-Man we now know and love today was introduced in **Amazing Spider-Man** #149. And yes, it may be that the real Spider-Man, introduced in **Amazing Fantasy** #15 and **Amazing Spider-Man** #1, has actually been missing for the last nineteen years. Last month we declared **Amazing Spider-Man** #149 a Top Pick of the Month, and we labeled all current Spider-books as regular picks. This is the biggest story of the year, and **Vantage** is right on top of it.

HOW TO FIND AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #149

"#149s can STILL be had at guide. Vantage recommends combing your local show, first thing in the morning."

Spider-Man Cover Artwork TM & © 1994 Marvel Entertainment Group

Interest regarding **Amazing Spider-Man** #149 has spread quickly, and **Vantage** readers have been hunting methodically. At this point, **Amazing Spider-Man** #149, the first appearance of the clone, is a tough book to find. Most comic store bins have been cherry picked — with all of the 148s and 150s left, but 149s taken.

Indeed, many stores have been receiving calls from all over the nation, from people looking for **Amazing Spider-Man** #149. Between these calls, Marvel promotional materials, and references in the advance-order catalogs, store owners have surely caught on. Thus, most #149s not picked up at the bins have been pulled by the store.

However, #149s can STILL be had at guide. **Vantage** recommends combing your local show, first thing in the morning. Many show dealers are not yet aware of the clone situation, and other dealers are often too busy setting up to check their fellow dealers' boxes before the show opens.

Forget about finding #149 cheap at huge shows with hundreds of tables stocked by national dealers. Check smaller shows stocked by amateurs and smaller dealers. Even some store owners may keep a separate stock for shows that has not yet been picked over. Shows outside of major cities are also best — stick with the suburbs and rural areas. There are definitely STILL plenty of cheap #149s out there. It's just a question of looking hard and getting lucky.

THE OTHER CLONE BOOKS!

THERE'S MORE THAN JUST ASM #149!

In a frenzy of excitement over the hunt for **Amazing Spider-Man** #149, collectors have been overlooking a variety of other clone books. Given the importance of the story, **Vantage** expects that even obscure clone books could do very well in the marker. These are the books to watch.

Amazing Spider-Man #144

This book features the first cameo appearance of the Gwen Stacy clone. We cannot confirm whether Marvel intends to bring the Gwen Stacy clone back, but it certainly seems possible. At the very least, people who read **Amazing Spider-Man** #149 will need to read #144-up to get a complete picture of the Silver Age clone story. This is where it all starts.

Amazing Spider-Man #145-147

These issues continue the Silver Age clone story. **Amazing Spider-Man** #145 features the first full appearance of the Gwen Stacy clone, and in #146-147 the Jackal attempts to kill Spider-Man by using the Gwen Stacy clone that he created as bait.

Amazing Spider-Man #148

Amazing Spider-Man #148 is important because it leads right into **Amazing Spider-Man** #149. This issue ends with the Jackal identifying himself as Professor Warren and capturing Spider-Man. In #149, Spider-Man will learn that the Jackal cloned both Peter and Gwen for his own nefarious purposes.

Amazing Spider-Man #150

This is one of the KEY books other than **Amazing Spider-Man** #149. In **Amazing Spider-Man** #149, a building comes crashing down on one of the Spider-Men, and the remaining Spider-Man wonders if he really is the real Spider-Man.

In #150, Spider-Man gets really nervous, wondering if he really is the clone. He beats up some bad guys while tormenting himself throughout the issue. Finally, he decides he is the real thing because of the strong emotional response he has to Mary Jane. Spider-Man throws away Curt Conners' test results that would have told him definitively, and he happily lives on. Then, in #151 dumps the clone down a smoke stack!

Clearly, the events in #150-151 will be important to anyone interested in the Spider-Man clone story. Issue #149 ends rather abruptly, and we can expect that after readers pick up #149, they'll hunt for hese issues to find out how Spider-Man confronts the possibility that he may be a clone.

Spectacular Spider-Man Annual #8

This issue is a clone follow-up story that comes in 1988, fourteen years after **Amazing Spider-Man** #149. The Annual brings back the Gwen clone who had left to start a new life at the end of **Amazing Spider-Man** #149. In this obscure Annual, instead of the Gwen clone leaving Spider-Man behind as she did in #149, Spider-Man rejects Gwen for Mary Jane.

Even more important, in **Spectacular**

Spider-Man TM & © 1994 Marvel Entertainment Group

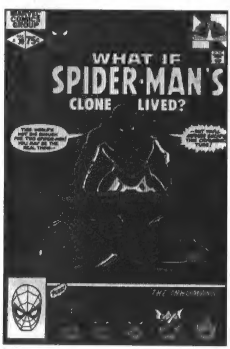
THE OTHER CLONE BOOKS! (Cont.)

Spider-Man Annual #8 the Evolutionary Man explains that Gwen was never really cloned. She was just some person, kidnapped and injected with a virus that made her into a "near duplicate of the original." The Evolutionary Man explains that the Jackal never had the technology to make an instantaneous clone.

This explanation makes the cloning of Spider-Man impossible and Marvel will have to fit events into it or explain it away. Either way, we can expect that the events in **Spectacular Spider-Man Annual** #8 could be referred to in current issues. Look for growing back-issue interest in this Annual.

What If? #30, Vol. 1

This issue asks on its cover, "What if Spider-Man's Clone had Lived?" Curiosity should push up demand for this book. While **What If?** books rarely go up in value, they can if the story is important enough. Key **What If?** books, such as those featuring Spider-Man and Elektra, have historically gained value in spite of their being imaginary stories.



Marvel Tales #126

History teaches that an important **Marvel Tales** reprint book can gain value in the market. **Amazing Spider-Man** #106 (reprint, 1st Punisher), for example, commanded quite a premium in the back-issue market when the Punisher was in its heyday. **Marvel Tales** #126 reprints **Amazing Spider-Man** #149. Look for this book to make its way out of the bargain boxes quickly. This is also an inexpensive way for you to read #149 if you can't find it at an affordable price.

Spectacular Spider-Man #216 and Other Current Books

A pick last issue, #216 is one that's definitely worth repeating. Marvel sources indicate that Spider-Man and the clone meet in this issue for the first time in nineteen years! Dealers were not aware of the clone story, or even that #216 would be a special issue when they advance-ordered. It appears that #216 could lead right into the August clone story!

Also, look for other surprise clone-related Spider-comics coming out in June and July. Clone-related Spider-books in July were most likely under-ordered since many dealers were not aware of the coming clone storyline when they placed their orders. **Spectacular Spider-Man** #216 and other current books that tie into to the storyline are picks with strong potential.

August and Beyond

Marvel promotional material for August finally announces to the public that the clone story is coming and that #149 is the first appearance of the clone. Also plainly spelled out is the fact that August Spider-books will cover the clone story.

In spite of prior knowledge, people will most likely advance-order these books in relatively low quantities. Keep in mind that this is Zero Month, where DC Comics floods the market and retailers' budgets with thirty-one number zero issues. Also, retailers are still cautious after the boom-and-bust of last summer.

All of the Spider-books for August look good. Remember that as a rule of thumb, **Amazing** does better in the market, because, as the first Spider-title, it comes with more credibility behind it. August clone books all come both foil-stamped and non-stamped. Unfortunately, the $2.95 foil-stamped books will have the better shot as collectibles. The story runs in the following order: **Web of Spider-Man** #117 (a striking cover with Spider-Man and the Peter Parker clone angrily facing each other in a close-up shot), **Amazing Spider-Man** #394, **Spider-Man** #51, and **Spectacular Spider-Man** #217.

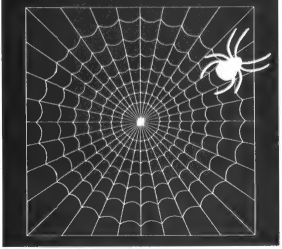
Spider-Man Cover Artwork TM & © 1994 Marvel Entertainment Group

CLONE CAMEO APPEARANCES

The stranger appearing in recent issues of Spider-titles will turn out to be Spider-Man's clone from Amazing Spider-Man #149. He has been appearing as a hard-to-see stranger in recent Spider-issues. According to an obscure Marvel statement these are the issues featuring his shadowy appearances in order:

Web of Spider-Man #114
Spider-Man #48
Web of Spider-Man #115
Spider-Man #49
Spectacular Spider-Man #215
Web of Spider-Man #116
Amazing Spider-Man #393
Spider-Man #50
Spectacular Spider-Man #216

The statement adds that #216 leads right into Web of Spider-Man #117, which kicks off the big clone storyline.



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"If you're not reading Vantage you shouldn't be dealing in comics!"
Ray Kelly
Kelly's Comics
Warwick, RI

Cut out this stamp and paste it on your Vantage stamp coupon!

STAMP #2
BOOK 5

THINGS DON'T LOOK GOOD FOR FLASH

In the wake of the successful Death of Superman, Knightfall, and Emerald Twilight promotions, DC appears to have it in for yet another character.

The Flash may not be as big as Superman, but Flash writer Mark Waid gives us an enjoyable read. He promises "major changes," starting with the introduction of Barry Allen's grandson "Impulse" as a cameo in **Flash** #91 and a for-real appearance in **Flash** #92. Thus far, advance-orderers have not been treating current Flash books as special in any way.

In a background interview for our Mark Waid interview, Waid alluded to the upcoming storyline. Here's that excerpt . . .

Vantage: *You're doing some of the key books for Zero Hour. Flash appears to be the first major casualty.*

Waid: *He certainly appears to be, doesn't he? These big company-wide crossovers are hell on Flashes — that's our line. First Barry Allen, and now this guy. I don't think it will come as any surprise to anyone that I care so much about Wally West that I'm not about to go cavalierly trashing this guy just for a cheap sales stunt. In point of fact, it's going to be fairly obvious fairly soon that we're not killing Wally West. We're going to use that illusion in Zero Hour, but it's not really a cheat. The issues following Zero Hour, Flash issues 95 through 100, comprise a six-part story called Terminal Velocity. Essentially it was Superman, then Batman, then Green Lantern, and now it's Flash's turn for a major topsy-turvy redo of some sort.*

Terminal Velocity is the story of what happens to Wally after Zero Hour. He has seen a vision of the future and he knows what his immediate destiny is going to be, and it's not necessarily a happy one. And so he has to spend those six issues learning more about how his powers work and training this new kid named Impulse, who is a blood relation of his, a cousin from the future, to be his successor. Because if anybody is next in line for the mantle of Flash it would be this kid, who gets a major play in Zero Hour and is one of the big launch characters who comes out of Zero Hour. Throughout this we also learn, with Wally, a lot more about whatever happened to Barry Allen, a lot more about how super-speed works in the DC universe, and essentially we're setting the stage for Wally's final stage of development. We're going to take him from point A to point Z as a character and it's going to be a fun ride.

Impulse is Barry Allen's grandson, come back from the future. His problem is that he was born with Barry Allen's speed, but something went wonky with his metabolism and he's aging at the rate of like 10 years a day. Unless Wally can find a way to help him control it, he's going to die an old man by the end of the week. So the clock is really ticking on this kid. No hype and no joke, the kid is really going to be a major, major player in the DC universe in the near future.

From **Flash** #91 of DC Comics © 1993

JIM LEE TO TAKE A SABBATICAL

After seven years of writing and drawing comic books, Jim Lee has announced that he is taking some time off. Jim Lee wrote and drew the best selling comic book of all time, **X-Men** #1. He currently owns and operates Wildstorm Productions, which publishes WildC.A.T.s and other titles under the Image label.

Following **WildC.A.T.s** #13, the end of the Chris Claremont story arc, he plans to take an extended break from writing and drawing for an indefinite period of time. Image sources tell **Vantage** that Jim Lee will continue to play a hands-on role in the management of the company. Lee will also act as a story consultant for many of the books Wildstorm publishes.

Sources indicate that his final artwork will appear in September, but where it will appear is a "surprise."

"The sabbatical was a promise I made to my wife two years ago when we had our first child, so I could help out more at home," Lee said. "But at that time Image was just starting out and demanded an enormous amount of time and energy. Trying to balance the needs of a growing company and a growing family was the most difficult part of my career. Now, with our second child on the way this fall, the time has finally arrived to make good on my word."

"Rest assured, the more I think about leaving, the more I'm looking forward to coming back," Lee continued. "When I do come back, I hope to be able to redefine my look and my work with a major new project, one which I will write, pencil, and ink."

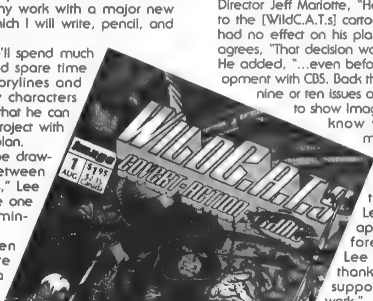
Lee says he'll spend much of his newfound spare time plotting out storylines and designing new characters and settings so that he can approach this project with a fully-realized plan. "I'll essentially be drawing sketches between diaper changes," Lee said, "so I figure one every twenty minutes."

"I've been doing this more or less without a break since I got into the business in January of 1987. I've come to the realization that the first stage of my career has reached a natural, logical conclusion. The timing is right, and it will be nice to have the opportunity to regroup — to rethink my style and approach to comic books."

Lee said that on a monthly book, the emphasis has to be getting the work done on time. This kind of schedule, he said, leaves little time for experimentation or introspection.

According to Wildstorm Marketing Director Jeff Mariotte, "He's looking forward to the [WildC.A.T.s] cartoon, but says that it had no effect on his plan to take off." Lee agrees, "That decision was made last year." He added, "...even before I got into development with CBS. Back then, I wanted to do nine or ten issues at a fairly good clip, to show Image's critics that I did know what a deadline meant."

According to Image, this summer's conventions will be Jim Lee's last scheduled appearances for the foreseeable future. Lee adds, "I'd like to thank all the fans who supported me and my work."



Wild C.A.T.S. TM & © 1994, Aegis Entertainment, Inc. dba Windstorm Productions, 1994

WildC.A.T.s ON TV:

THE DETAILS

WildC.A.T.s, the popular super-hero team from Jim Lee and Image Comics, will be featured in a CBS animated series this fall. Wildstorm Productions has released to **Vantage** some of the inside details regarding this event.

A full season of 13 episodes is now scheduled to appear on CBS starting September 17. Wildstorm is the Image Comics studio owned by writer/artist Jim Lee.

The show has been scheduled for 10:30 A.M. Eastern Time on Sunday Mornings, a prime time slot for children. This puts the show up against the highly-successful X-Men animated series on Fox, also on at 10:30.

Vantage has also learned that Wildstorm and Jim Lee plan a huge promotional push to get WildC.A.T.s animated series fans to give the comics a try. In addition to costumed character appearances in malls, Wildstorm has several other attention-getting plans in the works that they are not yet willing to release for publication.

Wildstorm spokesman Jeff Mariotte insists, "It will be hard for any kid this summer to miss seeing WildC.A.T.s all over the place."

Wildstorm will also publish a **WildC.A.T.s Adventures** comic designed specifically to attract series viewers to **WildC.A.T.s** comics. The comic will be drawn in an animated style by Ty Templeton and written by Jeff Mariotte.

The CBS scheduling department made the decision to pit WildC.A.T.s directly against the X-Men. Mariotte added, "I'm not going to say we'll blow them away, but I do think we'll do very well."

ANALYSIS: WildC.A.T.s COMICS

Television is a powerful medium. There are only three action-adventure super-heroes that the general public is aware of: Spider-Man, Superman, and Batman. Other heroes are lumped together in a pile of indistinguishable mishmash in the minds of average Americans.

To most people, television has defined what comics are, rather than comics defining what comics are. The campy Batman series of the sixties defined the Batman as a serious character in a goof ball situation. It was this perception, imbedded in the minds of the public by television, that sold Batman glasses, cups, and yes, quite a few comics, for decades.

The same can be said of Spider-Man and Superman. Ask a middle-aged mom who the X-Men are (younger moms may know thanks to television). She'll have no idea. Never mind that they're the most popular group of comics heroes of the past ten to twenty years. If mom were to buy little Johnny a super-utility belt, chances were it would be based on one of the Big Three, not X-Men.

Television now brings us America's newer, fresher group of heroes — WildC.A.T.s. If Jim Lee's heroes can make a strong showing on CBS, leading to a couple years of additional episodes, we'll be well on our way to the creation of a phenomenon. Another Superman. Another Batman.

Watch for short-term interest to affect WildC.A.T.s back-issues, and watch for the possible creation of a new nostalgia, creating long-term interest. There aren't very many of those WildC.A.T.s back-issues out there, and there's a whole generation of kids out there who don't want their father's X-Men. The premier WildC.A.T.s back-issues are #1 and #2 (with coupon). Also, dealers report that #5 is difficult to find. Nice, long-term picks, and perhaps short-term as well.

WildC.A.T.S. TM & © 1994, Aegis Entertainment, Inc. dba Windstorm Productions, 1994

DEFIANT COMICS: THE STATE OF THE STORY

Defiant's Schism storyline will be a crossover including every title in the Defiant Universe. Defiant's one-shot on the subject, also titled **Schism**, is a 48-page book due out in July.

"The Defiant Universe that survives Schism will be the same one that our readers already know," remarked Len Wein, "but it will be far more complex. Many roles will change and new characters will be introduced."

Playing central roles in the event will be War Dancer, Charlemagne, the Org, Chasm, and Michael Alexander. Others like the Dogs of War and the Good Guys will have minor roles. He added, "Some of our major characters will undergo profound changes. But others are just going to muddle along through the crisis. Hey, that's the way it is in real life."

Schism will also introduce new characters. "Defiant has given me a great deal of room to bring some of my long-held creative ideas to fruition," said Alan Weiss. "War Dancer is a concept that has been in my head for a number of years. Schism furthers that opportunity for expression. One of the new characters to emerge from this storyline will be another creation of mine — Raven Madd."

Defiant has been planting the seeds for this crossover from the very beginning. However, Jim Shooter explained to **Vantage**, "I like to leave loose ends and to search for correlations even as the stories unfold and the concepts evolve. This helps the story concepts to flow naturally into the answers, rather than trying to force those answers early on. This technique helps me to avoid the pitfalls of comic cliches."

Schism TM & © 1994, Enlightened Entertainment

One of the cliches in storytelling — not just comics — is that the good guys win in the end. "That is not necessarily true in life," said Shooter, "so why should it be so in our stories. At Defiant we strive to project a real-world feel into our stories. Not everyone is equally heroic or brave. That is a fact of any group of people. That truth will be played out in Schism. Some of our heroes will rise to the occasion, but others will not. The readers may see some noble attempt end in failure and some vile plans emerge victorious."

Shooter added, "It used to be in comics that when two heroes got together for the first time, they would pound each other before exchanging any meaningful dialogue. It's another of the cliches in the industry. But at Defiant, we ask ourselves, now what would really happen?"

"This is a fun time for me," said Shooter. "This is when all the threads that have been left dangling are tied together in a manner that almost seems predetermined."

Schism TM & © 1994, Enlightened Entertainment

VANTAGE QUICKIES

Axis Comics Shuts Down

Larry Stroman has announced that as of May 16, 1994, Axis Comics ceased to exist. All comics have been canceled.

The decision to cease publishing will not affect the production of **Tribe** #4 and #5 nor **Shaman's Tears** #3 and #4. However, after these issues are published, both titles will seek new publishers. Beasties is being temporarily discontinued as well, and Javier Saltares will also seek out a new publisher.

Fan Magazine has been sold to the editor.

"I regret this decision, but due to a change in my working relationship with Axis Comics Inc. and Tribe partner/co-creator Todd Johnson as well as increased production costs, creator apathy, and unforeseen market factors this action is necessary," Stroman said.

"It all ended rather abruptly," commented **Vantage** Publisher Rob Golub, "first they're in business, answering questions, providing artwork, and then the phone is disconnected."

Javier Saltares Moves On

Javier Saltares expressed disappointment over the death of Axis but declined to comment any further. He did say that he hopes to bring Beasties back.

Saltares has already found new, high-profile work, penciling for two different publishers' flagship titles: **Rune** for Malibu and **X** for Dark Horse.

Spawn/Youngblood Crossover

Overt-Kill will be be appearing in **Spawn** #22 and **Youngblood** #7 this summer. The stories of the two books will apparently be related. Image is billing the event as a "Blood-Filled Cross-Over." Overt-Kill encountered Spawn in #6-7 and escaped in **Youngblood Strikefile** #4.

The Invisibles

As advance-orderers have thirty-one DC #0s and the clone story to contend with, other books' quantities may suffer. **The Invisibles** #2, on the same month's order form, seems a likely candidate. Keep an eye on this Vertigo series from super-writer Grant Morrison. This former Animal Man star could give us a real winner in story and in market potential.

Zero Hour Promotional Support

DC comics has issued a statement that behind Zero Hour there will be "promotional support like you've never seen." According to Snydee Barwick, DC's Marketing Services Manager, "We want to work with retailers to make every Direct Market store the headquarters of the entire Zero Hour event by supplying them with the tools to make it DC's biggest promotional campaign ever."

In addition to checklists, videos, pins, posters, displays, and a window sign, DC is "mass-printing" at least one million copies of a 16-page Zero Month teaser/preview called **The Beginning of Tomorrow** as a no-cost giveaway promotional item.

Zero Month

Thirty-one regular DC titles will be #0s in August, as the ending celebration of Zero Hour. **Vantage** has examined these offerings for books that stand out from the pack. Any #0 issue on an established title is exciting, since the #0 label denotes a truly special story. Also, some price guides will list the #0s before the #1s of each title, making them a

Zero Month Artwork TM & © 1994 DC Comics, Inc.

VANTAGE QUICKIES

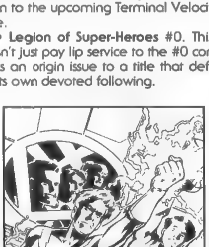
must-have for many collectors. Many of the DC #0s will likely be under-ordered in relation to back-issue market needs, since there are so many of them coming out at once. Thus, many of the #0 issues could be important in tomorrow's marketplace.

The following stand out as having the best potential:

• **Batman** #0. This character has a long, value-gaining history. Also, hints of a dark episode in Batman's career are in this issue. How can you say no to **Batman** #0?

• **Flash** #0. A semi-major DC character. Ties in to the upcoming Terminal Velocity storyline.

• **Legion of Super-Heroes** #0. This one doesn't just pay lip service to the #0 concept. This is an origin issue to a title that definitely has its own devoted following.



Legion #0 Cover Artwork TM & © 1994 DC Comics, Inc.

• **Spectre** #0. Crossovers with Vertigo books have stirred up rumors that Spectre will be joining Vertigo, which could only bode well. Spectre also has a nice little following.

• **Batman: Shadow of the Bat** #0. More of the dark episode in Batman's career.

• **Green Lantern** #0. A semi-major character. Green Lantern back-issues sometimes do well. Rayner and Jordan fight it out.

• **Detective Comics** #0. More Bat-ness. More of the dark episode. This title has tremendous history behind it, making the #0 even more ominous.

Spectre #0 Cover Artwork TM & © 1994 DC Comics, Inc.

Additional Zero Hour Books

Keep an eye on **Legion of Super-Heroes** #24-25, the origin of Valor, and on **Legion of Super-Heroes #37**, where Valor travels into the future. These books could do well if Zero Hour really catches on.

Bloodfire to Die of Aids

Sources close to Lightning Comics have indicated to **Vantage** that in October, Bloodfire will die of AIDS. The death will take place in **The Death of Bloodfire** #1, a one-shot special. Lightning will be working hard to get media publicity for this event, much in the vein of the Death of Superman explosion.

Adding to the controversy and potential publicity, Lightning sources say they plan to have one version of **The Death of Bloodfire** #1 bagged with a condom. The first appearance of Bloodfire is **Bloodfire** #1, though the #2 origin issue, with a 25,000 print run, is considered more collectible. Bloodfire has been billed by Lightning as the first HIV positive super-hero, and he will now be the first to die from the terrible virus as well.

Announcing...

VANTAGE
Signature Series

Vantage has made special arrangements to subsidize the costs of producing signed comics — we are passing the savings on to you, our valued customers! Don't ever pay $30-$60 for a signed book again! **Vantage Signature Series** comics are signed and strictly limited to unfathomably low quantities, and are truly affordable! The catch? There's two of 'em: 1) You must use the coupon provided– no copies; 2) If we receive over 100 orders we will return checks at random (sorry, we have no choice)!

Offer expires September 15, 1994.

The Ominous Press Portfolio

The Ominous Press Portfolio will be a jaw-dropping addition to any bookcase or counter-top. Signed by comics legend **Bart Sears** on the outside in rich gold ink, this is one of the rarest, most special collectibles ever to be associated with Bart Sears. The leather-style ***Ominous Press Portfolio*** opens up to display three separate full-color Bart Sears prints, making it a special collectible suitable for stand-up display in any room in the house.

Bart Sears formed Ominous Press after spending years building his career in the industry by drawing gorgeous covers like the one to *X-O Manowar* #14. He is today considered to be one of the top ten hottest artists in the nation.

☐ Yes, I'd like ***The Ominous Press Portfolio***, personally signed by Bart Sears, limited to 100, with accompanying certificate of authenticity! I understand that if **Vantage** receives orders for over 100 copies my coupon and money may be selected at random to be returned (I will receive a full refund).

Enclosed is $14.95 + $3.00 (shipping)= $17.95 total
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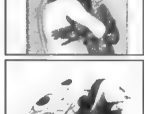
☆OFFICIAL☆ PRESS RELEASE

Comic Images

Reprinted below is an official press release exactly as it was mailed to Vantage. Since press releases come straight from comic publishers, they can be the most accurate, most up-to-date source of news possible. They can also be biased.

COMIC IMAGES



COMIC IMAGES SELECTS OLIVIA'S DISHIEST DIVAS FOR *THE BEST OF OLIVIA ALL-CHROMIUM* SERIES IN AUGUST

SADDLE BROOK, NJ, – If ever an artist – and her fans – deserved a premium quality treasury of her own "greatest hits," Olivia De Berardinis does. The reigning queen of pinup illustration for nearly twenty years, Olivia has inspired a spectrum of emotions, fulfilled myriad fantasies and re-invented her genre in the thousands of paintings she's created. Now 90 of her most scintillating, seductive, playful and provocative images are collected in ***The Best of Olivia All-Chromium Collector Cards*** **by Comic Images.**

With her unique retrospectives, featuring women gleaned from turn-of-the-century postcards and lingerie catalogs, Olivia has evoked memories of when innocence and seduction held hands. With her seemingly endless imagination, Olivia has enhanced the pinup, dressing it up in feathers, latex, leather and chrome. And with her graphic, colorful paintings inspired by Klimt and her Philips-style "fadeaway" pieces, Olivia has proven that there's more to her kind of illustration than pure cheesecake.

The many facets of Olivia's prolific talent can be seen in each of the three card series by Comic Images which feature her art. ***The Best of Olivia All-Chromium Collector Cards*** will gather 90 of her most popular paintings from these series, rendering them in the stunning, shining, vibrant effects of the Chromium Card™. Nine never-released paintings will complete the series. The card backs will feature commentary by Olivia, along with information from an exclusive interview with her.

Comic Images is intensifying the appeal of this surefire classic with the introduction of a brand new chase card! Six *OMNICHROME™ CARDS*, an opulent, pearlized, never-before-seen superior quality card, will be randomly inserted in the series. In addition, a bevy of beautiful bonuses includes:

- Five hundred specially designed cards, autographed by the artist with a certificate of authenticity printed on the back, randomly inserted in the card run!
- *"Ladies In Red,"* a rare three-card subset of brand new art, randomly inserted in packs at the rate of one card per box!
- A limited edition Medallion card, uniquely designed and numbered, with a certificate of authenticity on the card back, appearing in packs at the rate of just four per case!
- Miniature press sheets, printed in full color, front and back, and measuring approximately 5"x7", randomly inserted in display boxes!
- One uncut sheet of six special cards not appearing within the series will be included in each case!

The Best of Olivia All-Chromium Collector Cards **by Comic Images** (7 cards per pack, 12/36 count) will be available in August through comic and hobby specialty shops nationwide.

Based in Saddle Brook, New Jersey, **Comic Images** has introduced more than 75 different non-sport trading card series since its inception in 1964. Over the past three years, the company has won several of the industry's most coveted awards, including *Non-Sport Update's* **Gummie** for Best Manufacturer three years running (in its division), Best Chase Card (Prism); and Most Creative Set (Boris I); as well as *Diamond Comic Distributors'* **Gemmie**, honoring **Comic Images'** status in the industry. A Marvel Comics licensee since 1994, **Comic Images** sells more comic book-related merchandise – such as t-shirts, calendars, PVC figures and collectibles – into the comic and novelty shop market than any other company in the world.

VANTAGE™ Voicebox

One of this month's top card picks!

For more information check out this month's card picks!

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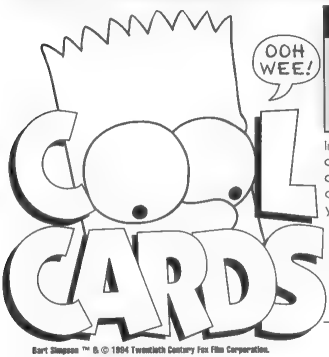


Bart Simpson ™ & © 1994 Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation.

Vantage Card Picks

Best of Olivia All-Chromium
Simpson's Comic Cards Series 2
Wiggle and Art Cards
Evil Ernie Premium Chromium Set
Coca-Cola Santa Metal Art Card Set

Quest For the Bart

The first set of **Simpsons** cards came and went without much noise — the cards seem to have sold-out, but some die-hard collectors are still trying to finish up their collections of Wiggle cards. A second set looms on the horizon, and it is likely that dealers will reduce their orders again, mostly because the cards will get lost in the noise of all the cards that are available.

Years and years from now the sets will no doubt shoot up in value, but even now there is a brisk market in the chase cards. When SkyBox sends out the **Simpsons Series Two** cards, pick up all the cheap Wiggle cards you can find. There will be a set of Smell-O-Rama cards, but most people are more annoyed by the smells than interested in completing such sets (there is NO market for Beavis and Butthead smell cards). There are disappearing ink cards, which may be fun and are probably worth collecting. Finally, there are art cards, which occur only once per box. There appear to be four of these, done by secret big-name artists, and you might be able to pick them up if you hurry.

Oddly enough, the rarest (and potentially most valuable) Simpsons card is found in the **Images of Shadowhawk** cards - the super-rare chase card in that set is the ShadowBart — be on the lookout for it!

*Oddly enough, the rarest (and potentially most valuable) Simpsons card is found in the **Images of Shadowhawk** cards...*

The Attack of the Summer Santas

Who would think to sell pictures of Santa in the middle of August? Collect-A-Card has chosen this Summer to release its next set of **Cola-Cola** cards — a tin set containing twenty classic pictures used by Coca-Cola in its Christmas-related advertising. Card collectors everywhere are still scouring stores everywhere looking for the Santa chase cards from earlier sets, and this gives them a chance to buy a complete set of nearly indestructable cards. Even with a summer release, the supply of these sets should dry up quickly. Just a few months from now, when the Christmas season rolls around and collectors' spouses and relatives start looking for that perfect gift, only a lucky few will have this set. The short supply and high demand should push up prices for lucky **Vantage** readers who already have a set or two.

Lady Death ™ & © 1994 Brian Pulido

Summer Reruns At a Store Near You

It isn't often that card sets are reprinted, let alone enhanced and reprinted, but this summer brings us no less than three such sets!

The **Evil Ernie** card set didn't attract much attention last year, but that was before the release of **Lady Death** #1 (and that astonishing cover). Krome Productions and Chaos! Comics have combined to reprint selected cards and one new card (by Jim Balent of **Catwoman** fame) as an all-chromium set. Promo cards for this set are already being greedily snapped up by collectors, and **Vantage** can't help but notice the seemingly endless demand for well-done chromium cards. Rather than issue the set in packs, the publishers have decided to release it only as a set in a special collector's box. The white-hot interest in Lady Death (who is featured on some of the cards) combined with the announced limited print run (they will be printed to order only) should give this set the extra punch it needs to succeed.

Comic Images has also decided that there is gold in them there chromium hills, and they are releasing the **Best of Olivia All-Chromium** card set. In addition to the chromium reprints of earlier cards, they have added several levels of chase cards. Some of the cards will probably be of a mature nature (as in partial female nudity), which will limit sales somewhat, but overall this set should outsell any of her earlier sets.

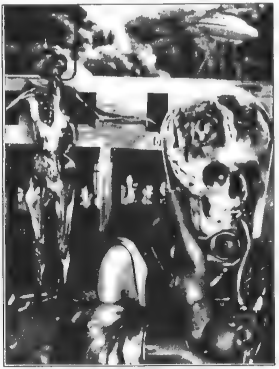
One of the most expensive card sets out there is **Mars Attacks** and Topps is reprinting this set for those of us who don't have a few thousand dollars to spend collecting the original set. In addition to the 55 cards from the original set, 45 new cards and a selection of chase cards are snuck into the packs. Although the cost of the original set is high, it isn't clear to **Vantage** that enough collectors will want the reprint set. If the cards do start to do well, collectors might also want to pick up a few extra copies of the five-part comic mini-series that started coming out in May — supplies will have completely dried up by August, and card collectors who want the comics will have a tough time finding them.

© 1994 Olivia De Berardinis

If Looks Could Sell

SkyBox has released several card sets in its Master Series, and its next effort will be the **Ultraverse Master Series** cards. Artist Dave Dorman has produced some of the best-looking comic card art seen in any set, but that

may not be enough. The first edition of **Ultraverse** cards fell victim to an extreme oversupply, resulting in plummeting prices. The second edition had fantastic chase cards that were quickly sold away, but the all-too ordinary regular set contained far too many cards for far too many characters that are unknown to even the most fanatic Ultraverse



Mars Attacks ™ & © 1994 The Topps Company

comic readers, who left the card sets sitting around. Vantage expects the new set to create a flurry of major-league compliments, but perhaps only minor-league sales. Oddly enough, the chase cards may be difficult to come by since it will not pay dealers to break down boxes of the cards unless they can sell sets of the common cards — a hard sell until the Ultraverse becomes more prominent. Long term, these cards should do much better than the first two sets, but most card collectors don't have the patience to wait and see if the Ultraverse builds up a large enough comic readership to help swell demand for the cards. Any serious collector will need one set of these cards to show off (we can't wait to open the packs and put a set together), but **Vantage** isn't sure a second set will make for good trading material any time soon.

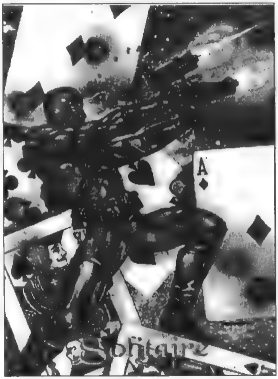
The Art Mart

We are offered no less than three more art card sets this month, none of which appear to jump out as better bets than the others.

Those who find realistic-looking fantasy cards appealing will be most pleased by the **Don Maitz Cards** from FPG. Don is a favorite in fan circles in the science fiction community and that offers a second potential market for this set.

Ron Miller is another fan favorite and Comic Images presents a set from him entitled **Firebrands, Heroines of Science Fiction & Fantasy.** It will help that the chase cards will be something called "Galaxy" cards rather than the foil-name cards that Comic Images has been using, and a second subset of "Winged Women" will be the rare chases.

For those who enjoy something a little bit out of the ordinary (such as the **Beyond Bizarre** sets that Jim Warren has done), FPG is putting out the **Tim White Fantasy Art Trading Cards.** Tim has published several books of unique art — you might do well to browse through one of them when deciding if you want to collect a set ("The Science Fiction and Fantasy World Of Tim White," "Chiaroscuro,"



and "Mirror of Dreams" should be sitting around in bookstores, waiting to grab your eyes when you open them).

Speculative Corner

It's that time of year again — here comes the latest set of **Marvel Universe** cards, produced by Fleer for the first time. These cards are dependable: demand is always strong, and steady, the artwork is always fair at best on the common cards, and the set is enormous (200 cards this time). One other important pattern has developed in the past few years: production has been far, far too high. Even with a print run at least 25% smaller than the year before and even with the success of the Spider-Man vs. Venom hologram, the last issue of the **Marvel Universe** cards are now selling at an all-time low of about $15 per box, which doesn't set a good track record.

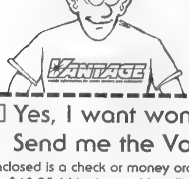
The promo cards for the new set don't look impressive, but **Vantage** still gives this set a chance — maybe! Fleer has already shown that it knows how to keep print runs under control, resulting in escalating prices for boxes of the **Ultra X-Men**, but dealer overorders can scuttle that hope (and early returns on the Fleer **Spider-Man** cards are still mixed). The other ray of hope is the three sets of chase cards for **Marvel Universe 1994** — holograms, PowerBlast cards, and animation cels all featuring popular characters (the **Marvel Universe 1994** set was dragged under, in part, by the use of the 2099 characters). These chase cards will be vastly superior to any chase cards in prior **Marvel Universe** sets, and if the frequency per box is high enough, then the new boxes should take off. This one is a gamble — one that **Vantage** hopes succeeds.

Quick Notes

Mortal Kombat II, the video game, is heading to home video games everywhere in August, and Classic is producing a set of cards to go with them. Some of the cards have hints on how to play better, which may help sell them.

Echo Productions is producing a set which uses some of the oldest artwork that will be seen this year, **The Betty Boop Cards**. The regular cards are (sigh) produced in the original black and white that the cartoons were in, but the chase cards are chromium color cards and super-rare holochrome autographed cards. There might be a market for these cards among older card collectors, but the black and white cards will be a hard sell to youngsters under 50.

Marvel logo ™ & © 1994 Marvel Entertainment Group.



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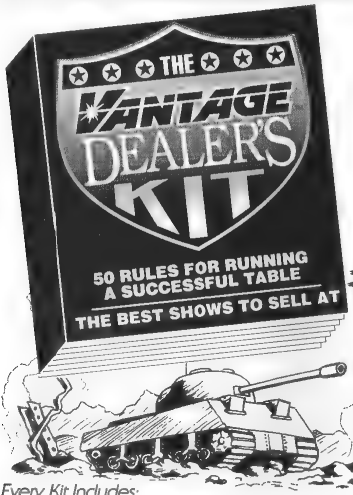

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We want you to help us spread the word about how cool **Vantage** is! Just fill out the coupon below, have your local store fill out their half, and send it in FAST! Hey, the odds are in your favor, because how many people are really going to bring this coupon back to their comic store and bug the guy behind the counter with it? If you win you'll get a special limited X-O Manowar #0 Gold...and of course the VANTAGE GIANT NOTHING (what?)! Plus, you'll see your name printed in **Vantage**! Wild!

READ THE RULES: 1) Surprise, surprise, no purchase is necessary. 2) To win, you must send in an entry (coupon) filled out by two people: The top gets filled out by YOU. The bottom gets filled out by the guy sitting behind the counter at your local comic shop. 3) You may send in your entry on another piece of paper, or on a photocopy of the coupon. 4) Send as many X-O Gold contest entries as you want, but each contestant may send in only one per store. The store does not have to carry Vantage. You can mail your entries to us all in the same envelope, so feel free to hit every store in your city. Entries that are not signed by an actual store employee will be disqualified. Entries that are not 100% filled out and complete will be disqualified. Contest ends 9/1/94.

YOU KNOW THE RULES. YOU KNOW THE PRIZE.
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"I certify that I really do work for a comic store and that I really do want my customer to win free stuff."

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On a scale from one to five (FIVE IS BEST), does your customer like Vantage?

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_____

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In **Advance Comics:** Look under Vantage: Press Release Review, before Wizard!
In **Comics Score Board:** Look under Vantage, after Valiant!
In **Future Comics:** Look under Vantage, after Valiant!
In **Previews:** Look under Vantage, after Valiant!
In **Up N' Coming:** Look under Vantage, in the middle of nowhere!

Mail to: X-O GOLD CONTEST
10238 West National Avenue,
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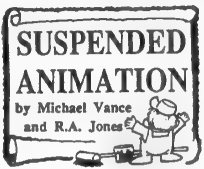
This entry should be mailed in by the contestant, not the comic store!
Good luck!

Congratulations to:
James Jajac of Kew Gardens, NY for winning Vantage #1000 signed by everyone!
Cassandra Gilman of Hellertown, PA for winning the DS9 Silver and Gold edition!
Lindsay Gezinski of Germantown, OH for winning VPRR #1 signed by Bill Tucci!

COMICS ARE FOR READING FIRST



The minstrel wears sweeping mustaches, strums his mandolin, and sings: "Come listen to my tale of a bard quite mad/whose talent is marginal, too/With quirky word and comical art/he turned all his fans to Groo, to Groo/To the wanderer they call Groo."

Enough silly verse. But you can't get enough of Sergio Aragones, famous for his tiny cartoons in the margins of Mad magazine. In **Groo, The Wanderer**, Sergio has created that rarest of gems, a funny "funny book."

Wonderfully, Groo is also much more than a parody of barbarians like Conan. Groo's diverse and heavily populated world (crowd scenes are Sergio's trademark) is so well realized that the foul-smelling barbarian with the intelligence of a snail is barely in **Groo** #111.

In that issue, a minstrel tells the tale of a dunce who decided to defeat an imitation Groo to win his town's respect and free food. The pretender dons a rag smeared with dead fish and pig slop to imitate Groo's scent. But success breeds failure when the real barbarian arrives and vows to slay the fiend who slew him.

But that's not when the fun begins.

It begins with Sergio's art. Wow!! No realism, no silly muscle-boy posing, no clenched fists and teeth, but uniquely stylized, these pictures are a refreshing break from the super-hero art dominating comic books today. This is fun stuff to grin at folks.

It continues with clever plots and dialogue, great characterization and timing, and heaps of imagination.

Am I gushing? Join me.

Mightily recommended.

TOP READING PICK OF THE MONTH

This month's reading pick comes from K.C. Asvitt, 12-year-old son of Vantage's Associate Editor Steve Asvitt. K.C. is an avid comics reader who thinks it's great that his dad brings home tons of comics every week to read.

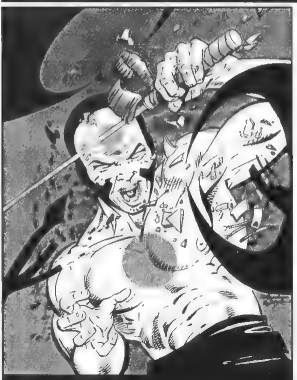
What's up with Batman? If you haven't been keeping up on the reading, Bruce is better since his last encounter with Bane (see **Knightfall** #11). Batman (a.k.a. Jean Paul Valley) is going crazy after months of psychotic taunting from Sr. Dumas. Now Bruce wants the mantle back, but Batman isn't willing to share. Bruce isn't quite ready yet. He's recovered from his injury, but his reflexes are shot. So he decides to take a crash course from the infamous Lady Shiva.

Shiva killed a cameo guest star known only as "Sensei" (see **Batman** #509). Shiva wears the mask of the Tengu. There are seven warriors who seek revenge for their master. Shiva gives the mask to Wayne. The seven come, each one more skillful than the one before. Bruce makes short work of them. Each one a victory and yet a defeat. You see, Bruce can't "pass" until he leans to kill. So after defeating the seventh one, he strikes with a mighty leopard blow. A death blow. It drives the nose bone into the brain, therefore killing the victim. Everybody knows Bruce won't kill, so this came as kind of a shock. And just then Robin and Nightwing enter. (Perfect timing, huh?) They are confused, shocked, and disappointed as Shiva looks on. Lady Shiva leaves in satisfaction. Minutes later the seventh wakes up with an awful headache.

If you're still wondering why Nightwing is here, it's because Robin asked him to come and help with Jean Paul. Together, they find a new entrance to the Batcave. While searching the cave, they go to a secret room where Nightwing meets Harold, who is a humpback and a technological genius who's been putting up surveillance equipment and tapping into the main computer.

KnightsEnd has been a good story so far and I think it's only going to get better.

Valiant Interview



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Vantage sat down for a working lunch interview with Valiant's Marketing Vice President, Marty Stever, along with Executive Editor Tony Bedard. This was a rare opportunity for us to speak with two important players in Valiant's creative marketing and story-telling departments, respectively.

VANTAGE: *What's the current playing field? Are there still growth opportunities for comic companies?*

STEVER: The industry is coming out of a low period right now. We had ten years of consecutive up and then eight months of down. The speculator dollar that came mostly from the card industry into comics got retailers ordering more comics than they could sell. When the speculator dollar left, a lot of retailers went out of business, which worked its way backwards to us. Retailers are very cautious in ordering now. I've heard a lot of plans concerning new companies but my prediction is they'll do poorly.

VANTAGE: *What are Valiant's plans in this new, cautious marketplace?*

BEDARD: Our books are intended to be read, not collected. The closest thing we've done to polybagging was **Secret Weapons** #11 and even that envelope was resealable. We feel if the readers get hooked on a character and his situation, they'll stay. We tell clear stories in a fairly linear manner. That makes us accessible. If somewhere down the road there's a **Bloodshot** movie and we get a ton of new readers, they're not going to have to know a long, convoluted history.

VANTAGE: *Tell me about Acclaim.*

STEVER: Acclaim Entertainment, Inc. is the biggest maker of game cartridges for Nintendo and Sega. Their two most popular games are **Mortal Kombat** and **NBA Jam**. They're buying us lock, stock, and barrel.

VANTAGE: *Valiant has been down the road before with video games (the first Voyager comic ever produced was a* ***Super Mario Brothers*** *comic), not terribly successfully. What's going to be different this time?*

STEVER: Acclaim is more interested in making games based on our characters than anything else. They're buying a very profitable company, a lot of talent, and a good stable of characters. Currently, Acclaim puts tens of millions of dollars into advertising. They made NBA Jam. Then, they go back to relicense and they're at the mercy of the products they promoted. So it's good for both of us. If Acclaim puts tens of millions of dollars on a Valiant character, it's certainly not going to hurt our sales.

BEDARD: Comics are an interactive thing. The reader puts the movement and sound together, and they can do it at their own pace. If you take a comic and film it or put it on TV, you're adding sound, and it's going to be completely different. Conversely, somebody who enjoys playing Mario, who likes the way the character jumps, might not give a hoot about Mario's life, and that's what the comic book is going to deal with. With Acclaim, we have a lot of concepts like X-O or the H.A.R.D. Corps that seem like naturals to base games on. I don't know about an Archer and Armstrong game . . . (Laughter)

VANTAGE: *Looking five years into the future, what do you see for Valiant and the industry?*

Magnus Robot Fighter™ & © 1994 Voyager Communications, Inc. and Western Publishing Company, Inc.

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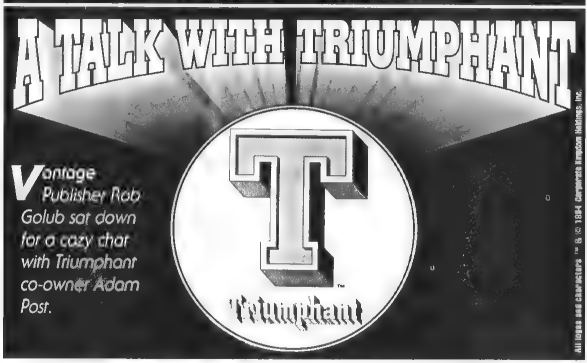
"Acclaim Entertainment, Inc. is the biggest maker of game cartridges for Nintendo and Sega... they're buying us lock, stock, and barrel."

STEVER: DC and Marvel are obviously going to be strong. Name brand recognition is everything and between them they have the three most recognizable characters and the most popular character group. In five years, Image will have changed, maybe broken up into studios. But Marvel and DC won't be thought of as the Big Two. Valiant and maybe one or two other companies will be big enough and successful enough to be considered major. I think we've already broken out of the pack and people think of us as a big comic book company.

BEDARD: So far, we've gotten by with fairly limited resources. But if you look at how much it cost to start up Valiant compared to how much we were bought for, you get some indication of what return we've given. Now that Acclaim is in the process of acquiring us, and if they provide deep pockets in backing us up, then you're going to see even more spectacular growth. As of now, we don't plan on going beyond more that eighteen monthly titles in the Valiant Universe. We top out this year. What those titles are is bound to change, but we won't rotate titles just for the sake of having number ones. There will be Yearbooks for each monthly title and a few limited series as well. Five years from now, we might have another universe line, cowboy comics or something. That's the only wrinkle in the equation.

INTERVIEW: TRIUMPHANT


A TALK WITH TRIUMPHANT
Vantage Publisher Rob Golub sat down for a cozy chat with Triumphant co-owner Adam Post.
Triumphant
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Rob: *You guys are talking about pulling investors into the company. Can we talk about that?*

Adam: Um, yeah, why not... We expect to have in the next few weeks a new CFO, which stands for Chief Financial Officer. And the purpose of that is to completely reorganize our financial situation, lay out a business plan. That'll be the first part of us bringing in a new management team.

Rob: *You two are the owners, are you selling part ownership in the company?*

Adam: The person who comes in as CFO will get part ownership, but the controls remain with Adam and Eric.

Rob: *What kind of money are we talking about?*

Adam: It will definitely be in the seven figures.

Rob: *How will this affect output? Where will the money go?*

Adam: The money will go into building a substantial presence for what we've already got going. It is not to acquire another couple of companies, not to launch a new line. We will also acquire new management internally. New people. Pull in some new talent, do some special things. In terms of a promotional level, things will happen quickly. In terms of a management level, things will happen more slowly.

Rob: *Do you feel that in recent months things have slowed down for you due to the current state of the market?*

Adam: Partially the state of the market, in terms of retailers cutting back and being more careful, but more so because we haven't been able to let people know what's been going on with Triumphant. Partially because of internal problems with keeping track of all of these comic books and not being able to make calls every month and let you know what's going on.

Rob: *Well, you guys do a pretty good job of that...*

Adam: Yeah, well we're all right but believe me there's a lot of stuff that you don't know. It doesn't become pertinent until… it's very catch-22, because there's *no* interest in that a character first appeared in Chromium Man #8. It's not really pertinent information to the market unless you know what's going on before. That's what small companies are faced with, they're faced with a lot of need for word of mouth.

Rob: *Triumphant has never really been known for having the top artists in the field…*

Adam: Right.

Rob: *Are we going to see more of those big name artists once you pull in the investors?*

Adam: Probably what you'll see is a few more flashy things like covers and in story arcs. We're primarily concerned with the continuing entertainment value of our comic books, which is really the writing of the comic books.

Rob: *What's your take on the state of the industry?*

Adam: My view is you look at these companies. You've got Marvel. Who the hell is running Marvel Comics? Who the hell is running DC Comics? What the hell is Zero Month? Yeah, it's nice short term, but what is that? How many books are they publishing. Do they know? How many imprints do they have? Who runs these imprints?

Rob: *Are you saying there's not long-term thinking?*

Adam: I'm saying that if you're into the business that you're in in this industry, you need to plan what your doing. You need to know what your publishing plans are. People need continuity in their publishing plans and their publishing plans need to make sense as much as their stories make sense. For example, we've all heard that Valiant is planning to publish another universe, right?

"That's what small companies are faced with, they're faced with a lot of need for word of mouth."

Rob: *Right. [Valiant doesn't rule the rumor out, but they will not comment further.]*

Adam: They need more titles? Or do they need to bring the quality up on their current titles to get the Image numbers? I don't believe that it's impossible for Valiant comics to sell as much as Image comics. Why can't they have better coloring? Is Rob Liefeld a genius? Maybe he is. Is Todd McFarlane a genius? Is Valiant reinvesting in quality? No. They're following the Marvel pattern… Let's put our more. We believe in putting in as much as we can, and then trying to constantly put in more and then continually get the word out. The problem is lack of resources for us, and that's something that we're addressing.

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THE VIEW FROM OBLIVION

By Corey Bond

"Is the average comic shop really that inappropriate for females?"

Female comic fans take note: Dream Factory, Inc., which owns a chain of Dream Factory comic stores and recently assimilated the Moondog's chain, has a plan for you in the works...opening a chain of stores that cater exclusively to women. According to the June 1994 issue of **Comics Retailer**, they intend to open six of these stores by the end of the year. What are they going to call them? 'Dream Factory For Her.' I'm serious.

I don't know what your immediate reaction is to this announcement, but I was instantly struck with the vision of a woman dragging her poor husband into a comic shop that's decorated in pinks and pastels. With the same enthusiasm he exhibits when forced to watch her try on a new Spring wardrobe, he hovers by the front door as she selects her romance comics, waiting for his chance to trot on down the mall and grab the latest copy of **Punisher War Journal**.

Except that there aren't any more romance comics, per se. So what sort of comics will one find in a Dream Factory For Her? According to Lori Raub, President of Dream Factory, Inc.: "Our stores will carry comic book titles focusing on relationships, lifestyle, humor, horror, fantasy, and related subjects which women particularly enjoy."

Hmmm. That's odd. That sounds exactly like the sort of comics I like to read. Does that mean I'm a woman trapped in a man's body?

No. What it means is that Dream Factory has taken a good concept and held a funhouse mirror up to it, reflecting a warped image. The selection that Lori Raub describes is an excellent one, targeted at mature readers with sophisticated reading preferences. A store focusing on such titles would be the perfect place to pick up the Vertigo books and the numerous quality independents such as **Cerebus**, **The Crow**, **Bone**, **A Distant Soil**, **Starchild**, **Hepcats**, etc.

But why take a good idea, a store dedicated to quality, story-driven comics, and sabotage it by alienating the majority of the customer base by calling it "Dream Factory For Her"? Is the average comic shop really that inappropriate for females? Lori Raub seems to be suggesting that when she states, "Dream Factory For Her stores will offer women an approachable way to escape into the enticing world of comics and fantasy." Approachable.

...Implying that regular comic shops are unapproachable for women. Does she, as a female, feel so threatened in the environment of her company's existing Moondog's and Dream Factory stores that she believes women need their own segregated outlets? Such an attitude from the President of the corporation must do wonders for the morale of the individuals who staff and manage those stores.

I believe that a Dream Factory For Her chain is a misguided attempt to attract female readers to the comic industry. And to ensure that this wasn't some sort of Typical Male Response, I brought this issue to the attention of a number of female readers to get their reactions.

THE VIEW FROM OBLIVION

"What, are they only going to carry Barbie comics?" was my favorite response, originating from a woman who had just purchased an issue of **Sabretooth**. Like the rest of the women I spoke with, she feels that a separate store is the wrong way to attract female customers. She was also doubtful that all of the comic series that she and her friends read would be available at such a store.

Some responses were simple, ranging from, "What's the point?" to "That's ridiculous." The more in-depth replies indicate that female readers find the idea of comic stores for women to be patronizing. One woman suggested that Dream Factory "should try to attract customers of both genders in a non-discriminating way." Another stated that the words "For Her" tacked onto a sign will not generate any business for Dream Factory, and that she would avoid entering any store with "For Her" in its name.

For the record, no one, male or female, responded favorably when I showed them the Dream Factory article.

I doubt that a Dream Factory For Her store will ever actually be opened. Surely Dream Factory, Inc. will research such a project before investing any money in it and realize that it is an outdated concept that simply does not appeal to the women of the '90s. But I hope I'm wrong — I hope I get to someday see a Dream Factory For Her, for the entertainment value alone.

(Corey, manager of a comic store For Everyone, enjoyed doing the legwork on the Dream Factory For Her Opinion Poll, and offers the above results to Dream Factory, Inc., free of charge.)

Artwork shown above is from **NEMESIS**, featured in ***Tempest Comics Presents*** Premiere Issue.

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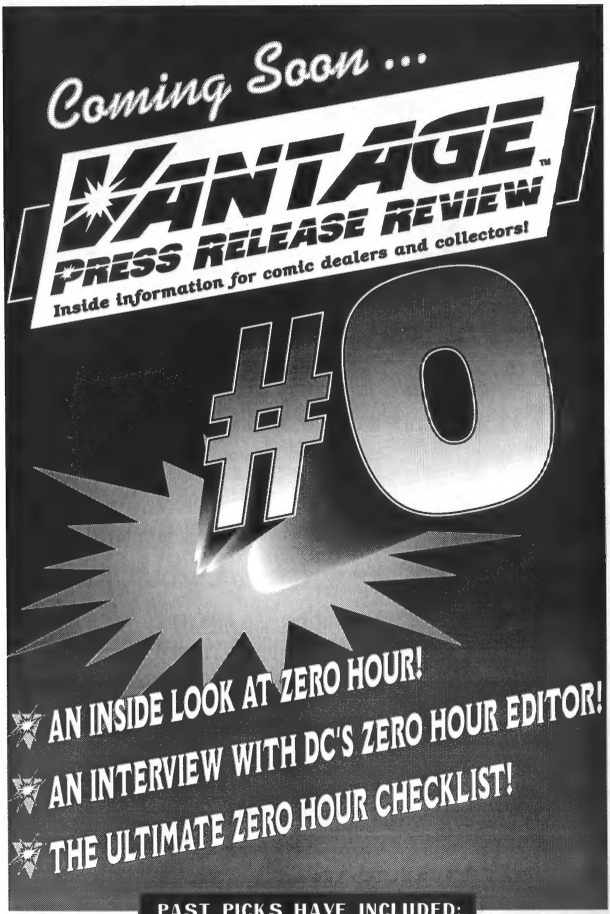
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